

# *a community called ...*

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# EVIL SPEAKING ;

OR,

A Bridle for the Unbridled Tongue.

BY

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## EVIL SPEAKING.

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If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.—JAMES i, 26.

SPEECH was the crowning gift of all the other gifts of God to man. Unperverted by sin, it was to have been the endlessly diversified medium and instrument of the highest social happiness of his race. Unperverted by sin, it was to have worn the high honor of publishing, as nothing else can do, the praises of the all-bounteous Creator, without intermission and without end.

Even as it is, averted from its destiny of blessing, at once and forever, both the receiver and the Giver, a gracious intervention continues to it susceptibilities and capabilities which suffice for intimating its original grand-

eur and power. Else, whence is the soul enabled to body forth its inward workings, its mightiest thoughts? Whence those exquisite touches by which it can denote, at once, its own emotions, and sweep those mysterious chords by which responsive emotions are awakened in the breasts of thousands? Or by what instrument are the deep things of eternity revealed to man; or penitence and hope awakened; or, in a word, a revolted world recalled to the allegiance of its Maker?

But this faculty, thus fertile, thus potent, we are to consider, and the preceding reflections will enable us the better to consider, as operating under the influence of that malignity with which sin has infected it, while, at the same time, it spurns the guidance and restraint of Divine appliance. Thus conditioned, two facts, out of countless numbers, will be sufficient to mark the extent of its power for evil.

The fact is, that this perverted faculty wears the hellish honor of having achieved the enthrallment and ruin of our race. The snare was set in silence; but it was a godless work

that sprung it. The devil said something; and the next moment saw him swelling with exultation over the enslaved representatives of a world.

The second illustration of the energy which this faculty possesses for evil is furnished by the fact, that the human heart, utterly void of good, utterly fraught with evil, and with all the malice which all hell can inspire it, cannot concoct a sin that, by itself, is sufficient to place it beyond the pale of pardon, till that more concentrated and active venom is shot into it which the tongue alone distills. That madness of impiety—and one must needs tremble while he writes it—which hates all the Trinity, (blasphemes them all, so far as the heart alone can do it,) would seem incapable of completing the sin against the third Person of the adorable Three till utterance gives it the finished form.

Quotation, or even reference, should be unnecessary when our Saviour's authority, upon which these statements are based, is so well known. It was "because they said 'He hath

an unclean spirit,' " that Jesus averred: "Who-so blasphemeth"—that is, as the word itself means, and as himself explains—"he that *speaketh* a word against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness."

Impressed by these great deeds of a lawless tongue, you will look with lessened surprise on its more ordinary actings. In the light of inspired description, it should be, but is not, bridled. It is, therefore, a beast, untamed and untamable, by human power and skill. His tread is leviathan's, his paw the leopard's; his embrace the boa-constrictor's, his voice the syren's; his hiss the old serpent's, his breath the dragon's; his eye the basilisk's, his fang the viper's; his tear the crocodile's, his heart the tiger's; his scent the vulture's, his wing, the wind. What can he not achieve, since he has ruined earth? What dare he not do, since he has opened his blasphemous mouth against the Heavens?

The spirit of the text stands equally against all verbal ungodliness; but we are now to invoke its sacred authority against the most

common and pernicious form of that ungodliness—*evil speaking*. In doing this we shall consider: What constitutes it? What causes it? and, What will cure it?

## I. WHAT CONSTITUTES THE SIN OF EVIL SPEAKING?

1. The highest degree of it consists in the origination and utterance of a known and perfect falsehood, with the intention of injuring the object of it. None can doubt that this is evil speaking. It is all that, with a surplus sufficient, under certain circumstances, to justify an action in civil law for slander or libel, according as the matter of it is published orally or in writing.

2. It is constituted by aiding to publish what he who does it knows to be false, and by which, at the same time, he intends to injure the object; or, what is the same thing, while he is aware of its tendency so to injure. “He that *loveth*,” as well as he that “*maketh* a lie,” shall have his part in the lake of fire. And



what clearer proof can he give that he loves a lie, than by volunteering his agency in sending abroad the winged mischief.

3. He incurs the guilt of evil speaking who reports any thing detrimental to character, by whomsoever originated, while the truth or falsehood of it is not positively known. We are not now inquiring what the civil law would do with him. He may wriggle out of its meshes, but how will he escape the penalty of that eternal mandate: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself?" But, finally, and to cover the whole ground at once, the crime under consideration is constituted,

4. By asserting or insinuating any thing more or less unfavorable to the reputation of another, though believed, or even known, to be true. It is all-important that we understand this; that, properly and strictly, evil speaking is not lying, but telling the truth of an absent person, when that truth relates to any thing evil in that person's conduct or character. Thus Mr. Wesley, in answer to the question, "What is evil speaking?" "It



is not, as some suppose, the same with lying and slandering. All a man says may be as true as the Bible, and yet the saying of it is evil speaking. For evil speaking is neither more nor less than speaking evil of an absent person; relating something evil, which was really said or done by one that is not present when it is related. Suppose, having seen a man drunk, or heard him curse or swear, I tell this when he is absent; it is evil speaking. This command, 'Speak evil of no man,' is trampled under foot if we relate to another the fault of a third person when he is not present to answer for himself."

The law of love, which condemns this practice, may, indeed, on some rare occasions, justify it. For instance: you know of a desire to injure the property, or take the life, of another person, and the circumstances are such that its execution can be prevented in no other way than by giving information to him who is to be injured by it. By doing this you speak evil of the author; but the law of love, which forbids the act under every other class

of circumstances, justifies, and even requires it, in this case. But, as was said, such cases are exceedingly rare; and he who does not meet with one in his lifetime can never have a justifiable pretext for evil speaking, and if he venture upon it it is at the peril of his soul.

Having seen how the sin is constituted, we are to consider,

## II. WHAT CAUSES PRODUCE IT.

It is a child of many fathers. All the unhallowed passions, jointly, or in turns, conspire in producing the miscreated thing.

1. Pride, the first-born of hell, is largely a father here—pride, that would rather be supreme in hell than subordinate in heaven; pride, that would raise itself to notice by ascending a human pyramid piled by its own hand; pride, that would turn all eyes to its own excellence by shrouding that of every other in total darkness. True virtue, like the diamond, is known by scintillating in the sun-beam; while the factitious article can only

twinkle under favor of the night, a night of its own creation.

2. It is the child of envy. It filiates itself with that detestable passion which feels pain, and conceives malignity, at the sight of excellence and happiness in another. Envy, the carrion-kite, which feeds on putrescence, and snuffs up its odor as a choice refection, directly begets evil speaking, licks it into shape, and, tiger-like, teaches it to hunt for the precious life. Pleased with a large object, envy will, nevertheless, condescend to a very small one. Every little infirmity is caught at, and where it cannot find, it makes one.

“ All are infected, that the infected spy ;  
All are jaundiced, to the jaundiced eye.”

3. Sycophancy ; a desire, for mercenary ends, to please a superior. Here the poor fool picks up, and carries to his patron, every little tale of scandal he can find, in hopes of getting, in return for it, a pat on the head, a bone, or a piece of bread. At once pander and priest, he is ready to offer up whole hec-

atombs of character, in propitiation of the god of his idolatry.

4. Newsmongery ; a passion for telling new and strange things, especially such as are spiced with detraction ; a morbid propensity, which gratifies itself by ministering to appetites as morbid as its own. They who are the subjects of this distemper can keep a hot coal and the surmise of a neighbor's fault in their mouth for an equal length of time and with equal comfort. But what most pains them is the fear that they will not be "in at the death;" that some fleeter and better-winded competitor will serve them, as Ahimas did Cushi, and tell the tale before they get there. Look at their hot haste ! See how they run !

5. Mere garrulity ; an itching tongue ; the sheer love of talk. People who talk forever, unless they thumb the same subject over and over must talk about every body and every thing, good, bad, and indifferent. The mill that never stops, and, at the same time, depends for its motion on a very small stream, requires that every possible contribution should

be made to it ; as, otherwise, there would be very great danger that, sooner or later, its clack would cease. So these never-ceasing talkers, as they rarely possess any great resources of their own, find it necessary to invoke all the spirits to their aid, whatever shape of gossip, scandal, or detraction they may come in ; as without this precaution the woof of the web of conversation might not be exclusively their own, and that they would appear to count a huge misfortune.

It were easy to swell this copaternal list with other names that equally belong to it ; as lechery, anger, jealousy, revenge, and, in a word, of every propensity of a fallen spirit, whether fleshly or infernal ; for, as all are gratified by dalliance with the sin in question, all are, more or less, concerned in the guilt of its production. Thus, as was said, evil speaking is a child of many fathers ; and, to do it and them full justice, I add, that the devil is the great father of them all.

But if you are an evil speaker you will probably say :—

1. "O I mean no harm!" No harm at all. You only enact the part of Solomon's madman or fool—I forget which—throw around you firebrands, arrows, and death; and, wiping your mouth, demand, "Am not I in sport?" But, perhaps, you are he that "seemeth to be religious and bridled not his tongue." If so, you will be very apt to say:—

2. "I can't bear such abominable practices, such vile creatures, and I must speak my mind." I understand you. You must sin, because you love God so well. You hate sin, and love holiness, so violently that you must serve the devil. Is this your religion? Bless God that you have no more of it; for, if what you have impels you to break one of his plainest commandments, it follows, that if you only had enough of it you would be constrained to break them all. Be no longer deceived. There is no necessity for it. The case is plain. It is not because you hate sin, and love holiness, that you are an evil speaker, but directly the reverse; it is because you love sin, and are unwilling to be sanctified, that you are living in

this scandalous and guilty practice to this day.

3. But objections come thick, and must be disposed of by a shorter method.

OB.—If we must say nothing of the absent but good, we shall find ourselves under very uncomfortable restraints.

ANS.—And so you ought, till you learn to be easy and happy without dabbling in the muddy waters of detraction.

OB.—The whole world is in the practice.

ANS.—“The whole world lieth in the wicked one.” “Come out from among them, and be ye separate.”

OB.—But the Church is in the same condemnation.

ANS.—“All are not Israel that are of Israel.” The charge is too indiscriminate. “Thou hast a few names, even in Sardis, who have not defiled their garments.”

OB.—Who is free from it?

ANS.—Every truly honest man.

OB.—According to this doctrine, where is there a true Christian?



Ans.—Wherever the principles laid down in the fifteenth Psalm, and in the thirteenth chapter of first Corinthians, are exemplified.

Ob.—This view of the subject shows a very strait way to heaven.

Ans.—“Strait is the gate.”

Ob.—It opens the portal of life to but a very few.

Ans.—“Few there be that find it.”

Ob.—But what is to become of all the ministers and Church members who habitually speak evil one of another?

Ans.—We can tell better when we know whether they finally repent or not.

If there are other objections, we must turn them over to be dealt with in our attempt to show

### III. WHAT WILL CURE THE SIN OF EVIL SPEAKING.

The remedial effect must be reached, if ever, through the medium of, what we call, moral suasion: considerations adapted to impress

the mind with the evil, and thus rouse it to effectual resistance. Such considerations have already pressed upon the path of previous investigation. In accomplishing what remains, we must not be expected to impanel every reason that urges us to wash our hands from this impiety. Time and space would not suffice. Neither shall we attempt a classification; but shall bring the reasons successively before you, that you may the more easily perceive their dimensions and feel their force.

To keep you out of this abominable practice if you are out, or to help you out if you are in, consider

1. It never does any good. As you have probably tried it, I ask, What good has it ever done you to speak of the faults of another in his absence? Has it put money into your pocket, wisdom into your head, or holiness or happiness into your heart? If neither, then it has never done you any good. Has it done him any good of whom you have spoken evil? Has it improved his pecuniary circumstances, or his intellectual or moral character?

If not, then it has done him no good. Has it benefited him to whom you have spoken? Abstractions apart, is any one, of all to whom you have spoken evil of others, appreciably improved, in property, intelligence, or moral worth? If not, then it has never done him any good. Is society at large made better by it? Who? Where? In what? All must answer, you must answer: Nobody, Nowhere, Nothing. What, then, should save it? Answer: Nothing.

To increase aversion if you are the happy subject of it, or to produce it if you are not, consider,

2. It destroys peace. Let any competent observer mark the origin of feuds in neighborhoods, and of the controversies which agitate the Church, and he will find, whatever of other elements may have mingled in the conflict, that, in a great majority of cases, the original occasion was furnished by a word—a word uttered in the way of evil speaking. For myself—and my observation has been taken in no very limited field—I must say, that, in

nineteen cases out of twenty in which individuals, or society, including religious society, are found together by the ears, the occasion that sets them on is something said by somebody, to somebody, of somebody. To be more certain, let us ask Somebody No. 3, What is the ground of this long and loud quarrel between you and Somebody No. 1? Has he cheated you? No. Has he stolen from or robbed you? No; neither. Has he struck you? Not at all. Pray, then, what has he done? Worse than either, or all; he has said something bad about me. And, pray what was it? Why, he told Somebody No. 2 that I was a ——. “Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!”

To augment your honest indignation against this knavish practice, I urge you,

3. To make the case of him who is spoken against your own. This test is easy; it is plain. Will you adopt it? I hope you say, “Yes.” If you are a Christian, or even a Christian moralist, how can you haggle at an assent which virtuous heathen and deists give

to the divine precept: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them?" You yield. It is well. I hardly need ask you whether, in case you have spoken, or are tempted to speak, of your neighbor's fault in his absence, you can lay your hand on your bosom and say, "I wish he would do the same by me, to the first person he meets." You know you cannot. Then the case is settled, with your full consent; and you are never to speak of his, or any other person's fault, in his absence as long as you live.

To give the preceding considerations more full effect, you will do well to weigh this question:—

4. Are you not vulnerable? You are running up a long score by throwing stones at one, and another, and another, of your neighbors' houses. What walls of granite are to render them harmless when rehurled at yours? You never thought of that? The greater is the pity. You hold yourself at liberty to say all the evil you know, believe, or hear, of others. And do they, think you, know, be

lieve, or hear, nothing which, uttered, would annoy or injure you? Nothing criminal—in-discreet—ridiculous? You are pensive. That corrugated brow shows that painful thoughts are at work within, and the shadow that is on it is cast there by some remembered sin or folly. Thou art in the Court of Conscience, brother. Thou enteredst with the bearing of the accuser, and art fain to sneak out of it, biting thy lip from the mortification of conscious guilt. Go! and before thou gather up these stones, just fallen from thy palsied hand, which thou broughtest to cast at frailty, be certain that thou art not in the same, or any equivalent condemnation. “Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge”—others—“ye shall be judged”—by them, who will naturally be excited to return the unkind treatment which they receive.

To render you still more sensible of the impolicy, as well as the wickedness, of evil speaking, consider,

5. It is flatly against your own interest. This must have appeared already; but I wish

to reurge it, and in a more distinct form. He who indulges in this low practice, comes, in no long time, to be distrusted, hated, shunned. Are discreet people fond of intimacy with such a character? Does he attract esteem? Does he conciliate confidence? I hear your unhesitating negative to all these questions. In so far, then, as you imitate that character, you are an object of suspicion. You enjoy less of the esteem and confidence of society than you would if known as one who invariably treats absent character as a sacred thing. As it is, whether you know it or not, the mark of Cain is on you. You are regarded as an evil-minded man, and—whatever you may think of yourself—as a weak one. Or does mental strength naturally associate with the open mouth, the slanderer, the blab? Every person of your acquaintance knows that he who is entertained at the expense of some poor wretch of an absentee to-day, must furnish entertainment for another set of customers to-morrow. Of course, I take for granted that you have no dealings with any



one who is simple enough to suppose that you, who are known to spare nobody else, will, when his regular turn comes, make a gracious exception of him.

Thus known, you are scarcely welcome anywhere; and you are never safe. That soft whisper of yours will be repeated a little louder, and re-repeated a little louder still; till, reaching its object, it comes back with a thundering rebound upon its dastardly author. This comes of your secret. Poor weak fool! It was too hot for you, and so you pledged fifty gossips to help you keep it, and they have kept it, just as you did. The consequences are inevitable exposure, with the settlement of a quarrel on your hands; and a deeper brand of shame, with a rich harvest of obloquy and scorn.

6. The practice is most disgraceful. What else can you make of the various appellations which the Bible, and common consent, apply to him who is guilty of it? Evil speaker is the least opprobrious of these titles. Do you wish to wear it? Tale-bearer; that means

you. Tattler; is that dignified? Busybody; will you bear that? Whisperer; is that magnanimous? Backbiter; is that human?—"is that human?" Let us see. Backbiter is a figure derived from the dog, and very properly applied to the human subject, for the reason that the human, like the canine biter, selects that moment of attack when your face is turned the other way. Justice, however, is due even to dogs. All of them do not deserve a place in this comparison. The nobler, the better bred, and especially he that is conscious of his own strength, if determined to have a mouthful out of you, takes it manfully, compared with the backbiting varieties, canine and human; for, after a warning growl, instead of fastening upon your back, he throws himself directly into your face. The backbiter, then, who affects humanity, acts not only the part of a dog, but of a mean one, and a despicable coward at that. Backbiter!—I speak to the biped—Backbiter! have done with these doggish tricks, or take you to the kennel.

"But I am not a coward. I had as lief he

would hear it as not." No, you had not. Witness your uniform selection of his absence when you speak evil of him. Witness, too, the disconcerting effect of finding, as you have sometimes found him, an unexpected listener. No, you are not precisely indifferent as to whether he, whom you ridicule or censure, hear you or not.

"But they are very small matters that I speak of." By so much are you a very small specimen of the *genus homo*, whether male or female; as, according to your own showing, you are engaged in a very small business. It is said of Domitian, the Roman emperor, in justification of the contempt which loads his memory, that "he employed his leisure hours in catching and tormenting flies." Sure enough, that was mean; the meanness of cruelty. And, pray, how much more honorably are you employed in seizing, transfixing, and holding up all the poor little things that crawl and flutter, in the shape of rumor, that you, and those who share your elevated sentiments, may see them spin, and hear them buzz?

But some whose tongues riot in this iniquity “seem to be religious,” and claim to be dealt with on higher and holier grounds. I address to them, therefore, this additional dissuasive :

7. Evil speaking is a capital breach of charity. By charity, here, is intended that love to God and man which the Scriptures, in various terms, declare to be the scope and end of the whole dispensation of grace. That love to God and man is the sum and effect of all true religion, is clear, from such declarations as these : “Love is the fulfilling of the law :” “The end of the commandment is charity :” “He that loveth another, hath fulfilled the law :” “All the law is fulfilled in this : Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Love being thus established as the sum total of true religion, it only remains to be shown that evil speaking is a capital violation of it. This will appear, whether love be understood as referring either to God or to man.

(1.) Understood as having the former reference, evil speaking violates it ; for it is the nature of love to aim at pleasing its object.

and God has expressed his pleasure on this head by the commands, "Speak evil of no man;" and, "Speak not evil one of another." So that, if knowingly to displease God is a breach of love to him, knowingly to speak evil is equally so, or rather the same thing; as it is precisely that, which he has repeatedly and emphatically marked as displeasing to him, by repeatedly and emphatically forbidding it.

(2.) If the love in question be understood as having man for its object, evil speaking is an equally palpable violation of it; for "love worketh no ill to his neighbor," not even in thought; for "charity thinketh no evil," and by necessary consequence can speak none. Evil speaking, therefore, is a flagrant breach of that charity which is the sum and effect of all true religion. Love is the whole of Divine requirement. Evil speaking violates love. It is, therefore, a summary breach of that all-comprehending requirement. From all of which it is already obvious that,

8. An evil speaker has no true religion.

This is not only decided by evidence already before us, but,

(1.) By the general authority of the text; which clearly comes to this: He who professes the religion of Christ, and so far disregards its spirit and precepts, as habitually to indulge himself in speaking uncharitably of others, is devoid of saving Christianity. That such a person's religion is a nullity will appear,

(2.) From the import of the term itself. Religion, as a word, is composed of *ligare*, to bind, with the prefix *re*, intensive, or repetitive; or it may stand for both. Accordingly, religion means, either, first, that which strongly binds; or, secondly, that which binds again; or, thirdly, uniting both definitions of the particle, that which binds its subject again, and strongly binds him. No word, in our nervous and copious language, so well and forcibly represents the appliance which God employs in subjecting the rebel man to his blessed service. It was his original bond. He broke it. It rebinds—binds again, and strongly binds

him again to the service of his Maker. Such a man is before you. "He seemeth to be a religious," that is, a bound man; but his reduplicated and strong bonds do not bind him. He breaks them, spurns them, runs riot over the fence which God has thrown around his brother's character, and rushes upon that inhibited thing with open mouth. His "religion" is, therefore, "vain," for the plain, the common-sense reason, that it does not bind him.

You say, perhaps, "I am not very particular on this head, and yet it seems to me that I have religion." This only proves that you are, what the text supposes, a man with an unbridled tongue, who seemeth to be religious, and thereby deceiveth his own soul.

"But I speak evil of others, and yet I am sure I have got religion." So you have; but, listen! It is the Judge himself who is about to decide the issue. Look! His lifted finger points at you, while his voice, which is for the warning of mankind, exclaims, "This man's religion is vain."



To inspire you with deeper horror of this anti-Christian practice, consider,

9. It is preparing you for the judgment in the wrong way. What would you think of that company of indicted traitors, who, on their way to trial, instead of concerning themselves to make good their defense, respectively, should employ their time in vilifying their fellow-culprits? You and they whom you condemn are going together to the judgment of the great day. The Judge himself has kindly notified you that your acquittal is conditioned on your charitable consideration and treatment of them; that whatever you measure to them, whether of severity or mercy, he will measure to you again. Regardless of all this, you are preparing to meet him, not by demeaning yourself as a penitent and humble subject of the law, but by a bold infraction of it in the condemnation of your fellow-subjects; thus practically denouncing as unjust not only the law itself, but the Lawgiver and the Judge. For, by setting aside the law, you say that the law is unjust; and by conse-

quence that the Lawgiver and Judge, in making and executing it, is equally unjust.

This, as was remarked before, is preparing for the judgment; but it is doing it in the wrong way. "Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law. But if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is " but " one Lawgiver who is able to " and will " destroy " the capitious violator. " Who art thou that judgest ? "

Thus characterized, and thus premonished, it is no longer doubtful as to the result of your final audit. That you may shun this accursed and abominable practice, as you would the perdition to which it leads, consider, then :

10. And finally, where the judgment will find, and where it will place you, if you die under the guilt of it.

(1.) It will find you neither among the members of the true Church on earth, nor the heirs of the celestial inheritance.

" Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle ?

Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?" Premising that the tabernacle in the wilderness represents the Church below, and the temple on Mount Zion the fixed and exalted state of the Church above, I remark, that we have here the two questions, "Who is a rightful member of the Church on earth?" "Who shall inhabit the glorified state?" The sacred oracle responds negatively and positively. Omitting the positive, as not directly pertinent to this specific issue, we draw your attention to so much of the negative of the Divine response as touches our present interest in the general subject. It stands thus: "He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbor, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbor." Generally, then, the true denizen of the earthly and heavenly Zion is neither an originator, nor a retailer of detraction. But, particularly:

(2.) He is not a backbiter, that ought to be in the Church on earth, or that shall be in the Church above; any more than other dogs ought to eat of the holy things of the one.

or shall partake of the pure felicities of the other. "For, without are dogs."

(2.) He ought to be expelled the militant, as he shall be excluded the triumphant, Church, who "taketh up a reproach against his neighbor." The heir of glory cannot prevent the factors and colporteurs of Satan from bringing to his door and throwing down the contraband commodity; but, blessed be God! he can let it alone; he need not take it up; he need not carry the reeking abomination to the next door. Nor will he. It may lie there forever for all him. O! there is magnanimity in that man. It were safe to assume that no virtue is uncherished in his heart, for the virtues, like the vices, go together; and where Charity appears, she is ever hand in hand with all the sacred sisterhood. As hell differs from heaven, so does the evil speaker contrast with this fair picture. He backbiteth with his tongue, and taketh up a reproach against his neighbor. It comes to his door—he belongs to the regular line—and away he goes with his smutty load.

If you are an evil speaker, then it is certain

that the judgment will not find you among the heirs of heaven.

2. But when God shall “call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people,” you will be found among those whom he will thus designate for destruction:—

“What hast thou to do to declare my statutes”—alas! some of them had been preachers of charity—“seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee? When thou sawest a thief,” stealing what was dearer to its possessor than gold, “then thou consentedst with him.” “Thou givest thy mouth to evil” speaking, “and thy tongue frameth deceit. Thou sittest”—deliberately—“and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother’s son;” a man like thyself, and, perhaps, a member of the same Church. “These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and”—though forgotten by thee will—“set them in order before thine eyes.”

Such, then, is the company in which you will be found ; such the reproaches with which you will be stunned ; such the condition in which you will be placed, by that awful day ; unless, indeed—which God grant—you take the warning thus mercifully sent you in advance : “ Now,” while there is space for repentance, “ consider this, ye ” backbiters “ that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.”

It is time I had done. The Scriptures, which I have hardly begun to array against this practice, denounce it from end to end as an unmitigated sin. They surround it with the gloomy portents of its coming doom. They hang out against it the fiery signals of the wrath of heaven. It is the world’s sin. It is the Church’s sin. Aye, it is the catholic sin, and, without a catholic repentance, will be followed by a catholic curse. Let repentance begin to day. Let it begin where, for the want of it, judgment must begin ; at the house of God. My strain is evangelical. If, therefore, this sin is upon your conscience, repent



of it as you would of any other, which, unrepented of, would shut you out from the kingdom of grace and glory. And remember that, with regard to this as every other damnable transgression, it is as necessary, as “it is meet, to be said to God, ‘If I have done iniquity, I will do no more.’”

Ministers of God, set yourselves against this sin in the name of the Lord: live against it; pray against it; preach against it; level the discipline of Christ’s Church against it; and you shall see the greatest reformation the heavens ever rejoiced over since a wondering world ceased to exclaim, “See how these Christians love one another!”

Christians! you would convert the world. Be converted yourselves. Put away this evil of your doings from before the Lord’s eyes; this stench from his nostrils; this stumbling-block from before the wicked and weak believers. You invoke the power of religion. You do well; for an unbridled tongue makes loud proof that you need it. You pray for a clean heart—for scriptural perfection. Behold



the scriptural test of that rare attainment: "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man." The evil aimed at in this discourse is at once the plague-spot of the Church, and the great element of her inefficiency; the direst curse and scourge of earth, and the object of the frown of heaven. Let hell, whence it issued, take it back to her congenial fires.

With two words, I leave my subject to your consciences and to God. One shall be counsel, the other prayer. Diligently observing the one, and importunately pressing the other, you shall escape this snare which has come upon all the earth.

COUNSEL. "Let us not, therefore, judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall, in his brother's way."

PRAYER. Set a guard, O Lord! at the door of my lips, that I sin not with my tongue. Amen.

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